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ABSTRACT

This paper presents practical classroom activities for teaching narrative/descriptive writing based on approaches to writing instruction that research indicates are powerfully effective, and discusses principles upon which effective and exciting instruction can be designed. The paper gives a brief overview of what research in the teaching of writing has to say about how best to teach writing, focusing on G. Hillock's meta-analysis of 72 of the best studies on teaching writing and on his ideas concerning mode of instruction, focus of instruction, and duration of instruction as they relate to the effectiveness of writing instruction. The paper then presents seven classroom-tested activities which illustrate key features of what research says works best, and which focus on descriptive/narrative writing. A 32-item bibliography and 2 appendixes (containing respectively, results of meta-analysis of the teaching of writing and student activity sheets) are attached. (SR)

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Approaches to Teaching Writing That Work

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APPROACHES TO TEACHING WRITING THAT WORK

Larry R. Johannessen

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INTRODUCTION

Whether we like it or not, writing assessment is here and it is *not* going to go away. Given this situation, we have a choice to make. We can ignore writing assessment, and continue going about the teaching of writing in the same way we always have and *hope* that what we are doing is actually helping to improve our students' writing, or we can accept the fact that writing assessment is here and view it has an opportunity to improve curriculum and instruction. Obviously, ignoring writing assessment leaves us vulnerable: We may never know for sure if what we are teaching is helping our students to write better. Even worse, it may be increasingly difficult to justify what we are doing to the community, parents, administrators, and even ourselves.

However, if we view writing assessment as an opportunity to re-examine what we are doing in our classrooms to teach writing and make appropriate changes in our teaching when and where it is warranted, we will know that what we are doing is the best that is presently available, and we will be able to justify what we are doing to the community, parents, and administrators.

Fortunately, research in the teaching of writing has a great deal to say to us about what and how we might best teach writing to our students. And what I am going to try to accomplish here today is to give you a *brief* overview of what research has to say to us, and then I will present classroom tested activities--some of which I am going to ask you to do pretty much as I would have students do them, which illustrate key features of what research says works best. The activities I am going to present focus on descriptive/narrative writing.

RESEARCH IN THE TEACHING OF WRITING

In 1986, George Hillocks, Jr. of the University of Chicago, published his landmark review of research on the teaching of writing, *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching*. His study examines over two thousand studies conducted since 1960 on virtually all aspects of teaching writing. The most important and interesting, as well as the most controversial part of his study, is his meta-analysis of seventy-two of the best studies which involves nearly 12,000 students at various grade levels. This is the part of his research that I am going discuss today.

What is a meta-analysis and why is it important? You might think of a meta-analysis as a study of studies. Using sophisticated statistical methods, and stiff criteria for including studies in a meta-analysis, researchers are able to pull together different studies from across grade and ability levels, etc., and examine them together as if they are all part of one study. It enables researches to draw conclusions or make generalizations across a broad range of studies--or in other words, it gives greater power to the conclusions drawn from a meta-analysis.

The following example illustates the difference in explanatory power between a research study and a meta-analysis of studies: assume a researcher came to us and said, I just did a study involving 100 7th grade students at two middle-schools and I found that if students do X before they begin writing, they're writing is better; therefore, I recommend that all students do X before they begin writing. Well, most of us here might say something like, "So what? I'm not going to change what I do to teach writing on the basis of what one study found examining only a few students in two schools." However, if a researcher came to us and said I have conducted many studies, which included nearly 12,000 students from K-college, in urban, suburban, and rural settings all across the U. S., and set these studies up to test what helps students write better in a variety of different situations and settings, with better students, average students, and below average students, and I found that when students do X before they begin writing, they write better, then most of us here might say, "Well, that is pretty impressive. While, we might not in the end actually have students do X prior to each writing task, it is pretty hard not to at least listen to this last researcher, since the power of his conclusion is much stronger than the first researcher I told you about. This is the difference between a research study, and a study of studies or meta-analysis. The conclusions are very powerful, and we should at least listen to what the researcher has to say.

Hillocks' meta-analysis has a great deal to say about three aspects of teaching writing: that is, what Hillocks's calls mode of instruction, focus of instruction, and duration of instruction.

Mode of Instruction

By mode of instruction, Hillocks means the combinations of teacher and student activities in classrooms, or in other words, *how* writing is taught as opposed to what is taught. Hillocks' identified four modes or hows of instruction (see Appendix A, p. 26). In the most common and widespread mode (presentational) the instructor dominates all activity with students acting as the passive recipients of rules, advice, and examples of good writing. In other words, lecture and recitation dominates the classrooms of presentational instructors. This is the least effective mode of instruction--it is only about *half* as effective as the average experimental treatment.

In the natural process mode, the instructor encourages students to write for other students, to receive comments from them, and to revise their drafts in light of comments from both students and the instructor. But the instructor does not plan activities to help develop specific strategies of composing. This mode is about 25 percent less effective than the average experimental treatment, but about 50 percent more effective than the presentational mode.

In the instructional mode Hillocks calls individualized, students receive instruction through tutorials, programmed materials of some kind, or a combination. In other words, the instruction seeks to help students on an individualized basis. This results of this mode of instruction are essentially the same as that of the natural process mode.

What Hillocks calls the environmental mode is the most effective mode of instruction. It brings teacher, student, and materials more nearly into balance, and takes advantage of all resources of the classroom. In this mode, the instructor plans and uses activities which result in high levels of student interaction concerning particular problems parallel to those they encounter in certain kinds of writing (I will show you examples of this later).

In contrast to the presentational, this mode places priority on high levels of student involvement. In contrast to natural process, this mode places priority on structured problem solving activities planned to enable students to deal with similar problems in composing. This mode is about five times more effective than the traditional presentation mode and three and a third times more effective than the natural process mode.

I need to take time out here and deal with a question that I know some of you have about these results and what they mean and don't mean. These results *do not* mean that you as a teacher should never lecture; nor do they mean that you as a teacher *should not* tutor a student who is having a problem; nor do they mean that you should *never* encourage your students to write for other students, to receive comments from them, and to revise their drafts in light of comments from both you and your students.

The results speak only about the mode of instruction that *dominates* instruction. You should examine your mode of instruction and if you find that you are spending more then 50% of your time lecturing to students about how to write and your discussions consist primarily of you talking to students, then you should probably work on incorporating more environmental instruction into your classes. In a like manner, if you find that your students are only or primarily writing to each other, receiving comments from one another and perhaps you, and then revising drafts in light of comments, then you too should think about incorporating more environmental instruction into your classes.

And, the same applies to the individualized mode. If you find, that you spend the bulk of your class time going from student to student explaining, helping, assigning exercises individually, etc., then you too should

seriously consider adding environmental instruction to your instructional repertoire.

Foci of Instruction

Hillocks also examined six different foci of instruction (see Appendix A, p. 27). What he means by foci of instruction is what instruction focuses on in terms of teaching writing. That is, focus means the materials upon which students are asked to focus their attention as a means of improving their writing.

Grammar: The study of traditional school grammar (i.e. the definition of parts of speech, the parsing of sentences, etc.) has ***no effect*** on raising the quality of student writing. Every other focus of instruction he studied is stronger. In fact, taught in certain ways, grammar instruction has a deleterious effect on student writing. In some studies a heavy emphasis on mechanics and usage (such as marking every error) results in ***significant losses*** in overall quality. Teachers concerned with teaching standard usage and typographical conventions should teach them in the context of real writing problems.

I want to add an important point here that Hillocks makes in his book about these results. In 1963, Braddock and others published a review of research on the teaching of writing. They examined hundreds of studies published since the turn of the century on the teaching of grammar and its effects on writing. They concluded then that the study of grammar had no effect on improving the quality of student writing. Add their results to what Hillocks found, and you have 80 years of research, involving hundreds upon

hundreds of studies, involving thousands upon thousands of students, etc., etc. and the results are simply overwhelming.

If you walk away with nothing else today, I hope that the next time you go into your classrooms to teach grammar, you will at least think to yourself, isn't there something else more worthwhile I can do to help my students improve their writing? The answer to this question, colleagues, is that just about anything else you might do to help your students write better would be better than another lesson out of their grammar book on some aspect of grammar, usage, and/or mechanics. What else might you do?

Models: Another focus of instruction is teaching from models. Hillocks points out that this focus certainly has a place in the English curriculum. It has a long history in the teaching of rhetoric, dating from the ancient academies in which learners were required to memorize the works of established orators. Emphasis on the presentation of good pieces of writing, and sometimes weak pieces of writing, is significantly more useful than the study of grammar. At the same time, treatments which use the study of models almost exclusively are considerably less effective than other available techniques. It is worth noting here that most composition textbooks rely heavily on the analysis and imitation of models as the primary method by which students learn how to write. The results of Hillocks' study suggest that this is not the best way to teach students how to write. Perhaps, you will want to reevaluate the composition textbooks you are now using in light of this important finding.

Free Writing: This focus asks students to write freely about whatever interests or concerns them. As an instructional technique, free writing is more effective than teaching grammar in raising the quality of student writing. However, it is less effective than any other focus of instruction.

According to Hillocks, "Even when examined in conjunction with other features of the 'process' model of teaching writing (writing for peers, feeback from peers, revision, and so forth), these are only about two-thirds as effective as the average experimental treatment" (p. 249) and less than half as effective as environmental treatments."

Sentence Combining: The practice of building more complex sentences from simpler ones has been shown to be effective in many studies. Sentence combining is more than twice as effective as free writing as a means of enhancing the quality of student writing.

Scales: (I think of all of Hillocks' categories this one is the most difficult to understand and probably his term for it is not very good.) What he means by this is that instruction that focuses on scales, criteria, and specific questions which students apply to their own or others' writing has a powerful effect on enhancing quality. Through using the criteria systematically, students internalize them and bring them to bear in generating new material even when they do not have the criteria in front of them. "Criteria-guided revision," my term for this focus, is two and a third times more effective than free writing techniques. (Later on I will show you an example of this focus of instruction.)

Inquiry: Inquiry involves focusing the attention of students on strategies for dealing with sets of data, strategies which will be used in writing. For example, inquiry might involve students in finding and stating specific details which convey personal experience vividly, in examining sets of data to develop and support explanatory generalizations, or in analyzing situations which present social or ethical problems and in developing arguments about those situations. Inquiry is nearly four times more

effective than free writing and over two and a half times more effective than the traditional study of model pieces of writing.

Simply because a focus is less effective than another does not mean that it has no place in the writing curriculum. For example, sentence combining, scales, and inquiry all make occasional use of models, but they do not emphasize the study of models exclusively. Structured free writing, in which writers jot down all of their ideas on a particular topic, can be successfully integrated with other techniques, as a means of both memory search and invention.

Duration of Instruction

Another interesting dimension of Hillocks' meta-analysis is his analysis of the duration of instruction (see Appendix A, p. 28). A common comment we have probably all heard at least once is "The reason there is no noticeable improvement in student writing is that growth in writing or improvement in general aspects of writing ability is a slow, gradual process." Hillocks examined the studies in his meta-analysis according to their duration. He found that the results clearly indicate that there are no significant differences among groups of treatments for less than 13 weeks, more than 12 weeks (a quarter), less than 17, or more than 16 (a semester). In other words, duration is not an important factor in the appearance of significant or non-significant differences in quality. In short, something else or some things else must account for improvement in the quality of student writing. If Hillocks meta-analysis is accurate, then those aspects of instruction that he identified as effective in the mode and foci would seem to account for improvement in student writing.

ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING NARRATIVE/DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

The activities I am going to show you today involve the inquiry focus of instruction with an example of a scales activity, and the instruction is in the environmental mode. The inquiry activities are similar to ones Hillocks used in one of his studies and I have designed the scales activity based on the studies in Hillocks' meta-analysis.

"The Snake" Composition

I thought it might be useful to show you a couple of examples of the kind of writing you can get from students with the instruction I'm going to show you. The composition on the first page of your handout, "The Snake," was written by a 9th grade student after ten days of instruction with activities like I am going to show you (Appendix B, p. 30). The assignment students were given was to write a description of a person, place or event. Students were given the same assignment before instruction and after instruction. Students were given one class period to write their compositions under test conditions, and they received no help from the teacher.

As I read the composition, note the students' use of specific details, figurative language, and the sharp focus. (Read.) Prior to instruction, this student is a capable writer, but his writing lacked effective use of details, used no figurative language, and it was not as clearly focused. As you will see in the instruction I am going to show you, the activities focused on these aspects of descriptive/narrative writing.

Student Pretest and Post-test

The next page of your handout contains an example of a student pretest and post-test (Appendix B, pp. 31-32), a remedial 7th grade student from the south side of Chicago, that was part of another study by Hillocks. As I read the two compositions which the student wrote on the same topic, I think you will be able to see how the instruction helped the student improve her writing in the areas I just discussed.

In The Act--Introductory Activity

This first activity (Appendix B, pp. 33-35) is what I call an introductory activity (Johannessen, Kahn, and Walter 1984 and Smagorinsky, McCann, and Kern 1987). It is designed to point out to students the importance of careful observation and the need to pay attention to specific details. In addition, it is designed to interest or engage students in the inquiry strategy that they will be learning in this set of activities.

I begin by passing out the sheet labelled "In The Act" (Appendix B, p. 33). I tell students that they have one minute to study the drawing. After one minute, I either collect the drawing or have students turn it over on their desks with the direction that they cannot look at until I tell them they can.

Then I pass out the next two sheets, "In The Act II" (Appendix B, pp. 34-35). As you can see these sheets ask that students attempt to identify some very specific details about the man who is blanked out of the drawing on the first page of "In The Act II." I give students about five minutes to fill out the two sheets, which, as you can see, ask for everything from his age to

whether or not he had dirt on his shoes--if in fact he was wearing shoes and not boots.

Once students have completed their sheets, I lead a class discussion of their answers. What becomes clear as the discussion develops is that students did not look very closely at the drawing. For example, in a class of twenty-five students, about 1/3 say the man was under 40 years of age, another 1/3 say he was from 40-60, and another 1/3 say he was over 60.

After we have discussed all of their answers--or if they just can't wait to look back at the original drawing--we look at the original sheet again to see how well they did. A few students have usually done pretty well at observing and noting details, but most students usually have done very well. At this point, I refer to what they have done in the activity as being able to observe closely and pick out specific detials. I sometimes mention that what they did in this activity is exactly what police investigators must do or what they might be asked to do if they witness a crime.

The activity works in a number of ways:

- it captures their interest and attention;
- it increases the amount of student participation in class;
- it introduces the importance of close observation;
- and, it makes students aware of the need to have specific details.

Shell Game Activity

This next activity, the Shell Game, was originally developed by George Hillocks (1975). The version I'm going to show you today is one that modifies some aspects of his activity. However, the purpose of the activity has not changed: it is designed to help students improve their skills in observations and description.

Before trying to do this activity yourself, you need to put together a set of about fifteen similar sea shells like the one I am showing you (shells of the same type). I purchased this set at a Pier 1 import store for about $3.00. Once you have your shells, the next step is to put a small piece of tape on each shell and on the tape write a number--number them consecutively, from 1 to 15. This is very important as you will see later. Now, you are ready to do the activity with your students.

In class, put your students in small groups of from three to five. Next, go around the class and give each group one shell. Then, tell the groups that they must write a composition (one composition per group--not a list) describing their shell so that another group will be able to pick it out from all of the other shell. Oh, by the way, I have found it necessary to add a few rules. First, groups may not describe the tape or give the number of their shell in their compositions. Second, they may not write or make marks on the shells.

I give the groups about twenty to thirty minutes to write their compositions. Then, I collect the shells and the compositions. The next step is to give each group a composition written by another group. Also, I put the shells together on a table in front of the classroom. I then instruct the groups to read the composition they have and have them come to the front of the room one or two groups at a time to try to pick the shell that is being described in the composition. I usually give them two minutes or so to try to

pick out the composition and tell them to write the number of the shell that they think is being described on the composition and return to their seats.

Once all of the groups have had an opportunity to pick out the correct shell, I have each group read the composition and identify the number of the shell they picked out. The group that wrote the composition tells if the group that read their composition picked out the correct shell. Students really enjoy this part of the activity. It is a kind of guessing game with a purpose.

When all compositions have been read, we then assess the results. Usually, about half of the groups have been able to pick out the correct shell. I then ask those groups to explain what in the composition enabled them to pick the right shell. The answer is always details, specific details that enabled them to go to the correct shell. Often, successful compositions focus on the shapes, size, color variations, and unique textures of a particular shell. In short, successful compositions have focused on the specific details of the particular shell. It is a good idea to reinforce, underscore, particularly effective use of specific details in the compositions. If students have used figurative language, which they often do, reinforce this as well.

Before the groups return the compositions to the writers, I ask the groups to do one last thing. I ask them to underline the best specific detail, circle one part that was vague or confusing, and write one thing that could be done to the composition to improve it.

This activity works because if students are going to write a successful composition, then they must observe their shell closely, note specific details and include them in the composition Those who do not do a very good job see *why* they need to observe closely and *why* they need to include specific details in their writing. In short, this activity teaches itself.

Variations on the Shell Game

This is a wonderful activity for helping students learn to obvserve closely and use specific details in their writing, and there is no reason why you can't do the activity--with variations--more than once. In fact, I often use this same or similar format but with other objects. I have done it with potatoes, lemons, small decorative stones, carrots, and pine cones. Depending on the class, the second time through I put students in pairs. If most of them seem to be getting the idea, then I give each student an object of their own to describe.

There really is no limit to the possibilities for objects to use in this activity. The only requirement is that it be something that will require students to observe carefully and translate their observations into specific details in writing.

Smells Activity

One day a few years ago I was lamenting the fact that no matter what I did I couldn't get my students to use smell detials in their writing. At the time I was standing in a check-out line at my local drug store buying, I think, some aspirin for my headache. I glanced over at the items on the point-of-purchase wrack--oh, you know, the usual chewing gum, candy, and other assorted nonsense--and something struck my eye--"Scratch-n'-sniff." If you haven't seen these wonderful little items, they come in packs of five to fifteen sheets and cost anywhere from $1.00 to $5.00. Each sheet has a set of one particular smell such as grape, motor oil, strawberry, peanut

butter, pizza, or old shoes. The idea is that when you scratch the surface off of one of these circles, the odor of that smell comes through very strong. As I stood there looking at these marvelous items, I realized that at last I had found the answer to my students' smell problem. If I remember correctly, I put the bottle of aspirin back and bought twenty or so sheets of "Scratch-n'-sniff." This activity requires that you have some of these "Scratch-n'-sniff" things.

I'm going to ask you to do this activity as I would have students do it. This will help give you a sense of the skills students are learning. Also, it will help you to anticipate potential difficulties students will have and consider ways to deal with them. Finally, it will give you a sense of the way this works in class with students.

I begin by putting students in small groups of three to five or sometimes in pairs. Then, I pass out the "Smells" activity sheet (Appendix B, p. 36). Once each group or pair has a sheet, I go around the room and give each group or pair a different smell. Then, I briefly go over the directions. Note that the first question asks them to identify the smell. Fortunately, the makers of these "Scratch-n'-sniff" things like to be cute. Often, the little picture on the circle that is designed to suggest what the smell is can be very misleading. This is good because it requires students to focus in on "observing the smell closely."

I usually give students ten to twenty minutes to complete the activity sheet, and then I go over their answers. I begin by asking students to read the sentence they wrote for number 5. Of course, I comment on any effective details and figurative language students have used. Once all sentences have been read, I ask volunteers to read the comparisons they made in number 4. Once again, I reinforce effective comparisons. Finally, I

discuss their answers to questions #2 and #3. Here students had to use synesthasia (using one sense to describe another) to describe their smells. The reason why this is in this activity is that unfortunately there are not many words in the English language for students to describe smells. Once again, I reinforce particularly effective description.

Usually, I put students back into groups or pairs (and sometimes on their own) and give them a second and different "Scratch-n'-sniff" and activity sheet to work on. This step reinforces the skills students have learned the first time through. In this activity, students have learned to "closely observe" smells and various ways to describe smell, and even how to use figurative language to describe smells.

Figurative Language Activity

The activities that I have shown you so far encourage students to use figurative language. However, I have found that if you want students to include figurative language in their writing it necessary to include an actvity that focuses specifically on figurative language. This activity shows students how to see comparisons in what they observe and how to translate their observations in effective figurative language in written discourse.

To do this activity you need to make a set of slides or gather photographs that lend themselves to figurative language. The photographs need to be carefully selected. I begin by passing out the "Figurative Language" activity sheet (Appendix B, p. 37). I show the first slide and go over the example on the sheet (the slides are not included in this manuscript). Note that the saguaro cactus in the slide does "look like a cowboy wearing a ten-gallon hat and reaching for his six-shooter," which is

the example comparison on the sheet. Then note that I warn students about using cliches such as "The saguaro cactus is as skinny as a beanpole."

After we have gone over the example and what to avoid, I then show students a series of slides one at a time and ask them to complete the comparison started for them on the activity sheet. Notice how the comparisons students are asked to complete here show students different ways to make and write comparisons. After each slide, I give them some time to complete their comparisons, and then I ask them to read what they have come up with. This step is important because I can reinforce effective comparisons and help students who are having difficulties.

Once we have finished the comparisons on the sheet, I show students a series of three slides and have them pick one of them and write a paragraph describing what they see. I tell them that they must have at least two comparisons in the paragraph. When paragraphs are finished, I have volunteers read their paragraphs and emphasize effective use of figurative language in their descriptions.

Voluptuary Activity

Up to this point, students have practiced observing and describing skills (what Hillocks calls Inquiry) and the focus has been on individual skills. That is, it has been on getting them to observe closely, become aware of the need for specific details, getting them to use specific details, getting them to use different kinds of sensory detials, and finally getting students to use figurative language. However, students have not has yet had to put all of these things together. This next activity is designed to do exactly that, and it is also designed to get them to focus their detials toward a "dominant

impression" or central focus as in the "Snake" composition I showed you earlier.

This activity utilizes James Gilray's 18th Century satiric drawing of the Prince of Whales. I begin by passing out the drawing (Appendix B, p. 38). Then, I put students in small groups and have them list at least ten details to describe the man in the drawing. After ten minutes or so, I have students read their lists. Some students come up with things like, "He's fat" or "He's a slob!" Other students have details such as, "He's so fat he looks like he's pregnant." As we discuss effective details and figurative language, students see what kinds of details effectively describe the man. We also discuss what the artist is saying about Prince Hal through the details in the drawing. Students realize that he is trying to show that he is a glutton.

As we discuss their lists and the details in the drawing and how they contribe to the overall impression the artist wants to convey of the man, I have students add details to their lists. Then, I give students the following assignment:

> Imagine that you walked into the room and saw Prince Hal. Write a letter to a friend of yours in which you describe what you saw while you were in the room. Use the details in your description to make a point about what you saw.

I give students plenty of time to finish writing their compositions. They usually enjoy this assignment. There is something about this drawing that students find fascinating. I rarely have problems getting them to start writing.

This activity works in part because the drawing is interesting to students, there are many details--from a variety of senses, and it lends itself to figurative language. However, it also works because the details in the drawing contribute to a central impression which is exactly what I want students to do in writing their compositions. Prior to this activity students had not had to select sensory details that would contribute to a dominate impression. This activity helps them see that effective description utilizes details that contribute to a central impression.

Scales--Criteria Guided Revision Activity

These kinds of activities seem to work best near the end of a sequence of activities like the ones I have just shown you, perhaps just before students are given their final assignments. What you need to do is give students four or five composition that represent different levels of quality, like the four compositions you see next in your handout (Appendix B, pp. 39-43). Along with the compositions give them a set of questions, a check sheet, or in some way give them guidelines that represent the criteria that will be used in evaluating or determining the quality of the type of writing under consideration.

The sheet you see after the four compositions (Appendix B, pp. 44-45) is one that I have used a number of times. It involves a section to help them evaluate a composition, and also it includes sub-sections to help them see what makes a particular composition strong or weak.

Notice that the sheet is keyed to the instruction that I have just shown you, and that it is set up to be done in small groups. I have tried having students evaluate compositions on their own, but it just does not work very

well. They need the interaction and support of a small group for this kind of activity to work.

What I do is pass out the four compositions and have students read them on their own. Then I pass out the evaluation sheet, go over it with them to make sure they understand the criteria and how to do it. Then, I put them in small groups and have the groups fill out one sheet for each composition. When they have finished, I have a whole class discussion of their findings.

The discussions are often quite lively and interesting. For example, while most students rank "Zipper," as the best one, followed by "The Hit," followed by "My Adventure," with "The Greatest Moment of My Life" as the weakest composition, some students start out arguing that "The Hit" is the best one, followed by "Zipper." As we discuss their reasons, students often saw something like, "Well, 'The Hit' is more direct. It tells you what happened." Yes, that is true other students argue, but the problem is that is all that it does. There is no excitement to the experience and their should be. In contrast, the writer of "Zipper," tells us what happened and also how it felt to experience the ride on the Zipper. Ultimately, students see the difference between the two compositions and why "Zipper" is a little better.

The next step is to have students actually revise a weak composition. On the next two pages of your handout (Appendix B, pp. 46-47), you will find "The Soccer Game" composition, and on the next page a set of guide questions, designed to help students go about improving this composition. First let me read the composition. (Read.)

Now, if you'll look at the questions, you can see that they are carefully set up to help student generate ideas and details that could be used to

improve the composition. Again, note that the questions are keyed to the instructional sequence I have shown you.

I pass this sheet out to students and have them work in small groups to generate ideas and details. Then, I usually have a class discussion of their answers--sometimes I skip it if they are not having any trouble--and then I either have each small group produce a revised essay or have each student write a revision of the essay utilizing the answers to the questions.

Let me just read to you one revision a junior high school student wrote of this composition (Appendix B, p. 48). (Read.) I think you can see how this kind of activity helps students internalize the criteria for a good piece of writing of this type, which also seems to help them to improve the writing of others and in the end help them to improve the quality of their own writing.

What I have tried to do here today is to show you some practical classroom activities for teaching narrative/descriptive writing based on approaches to teaching writing that research indicates has a powerful effect on improving the quality of student writing. More importantly, I have tried to show you how you can design exciting instruction that I have found will help students improve their writing.

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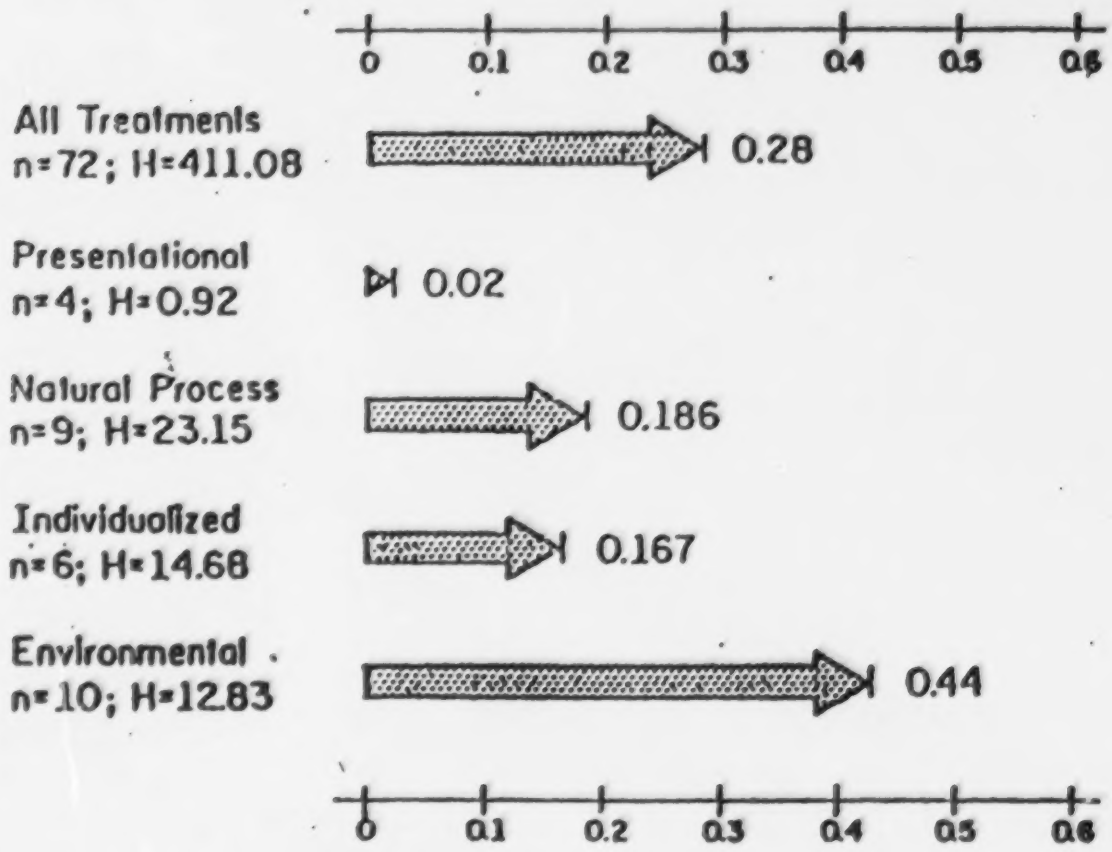
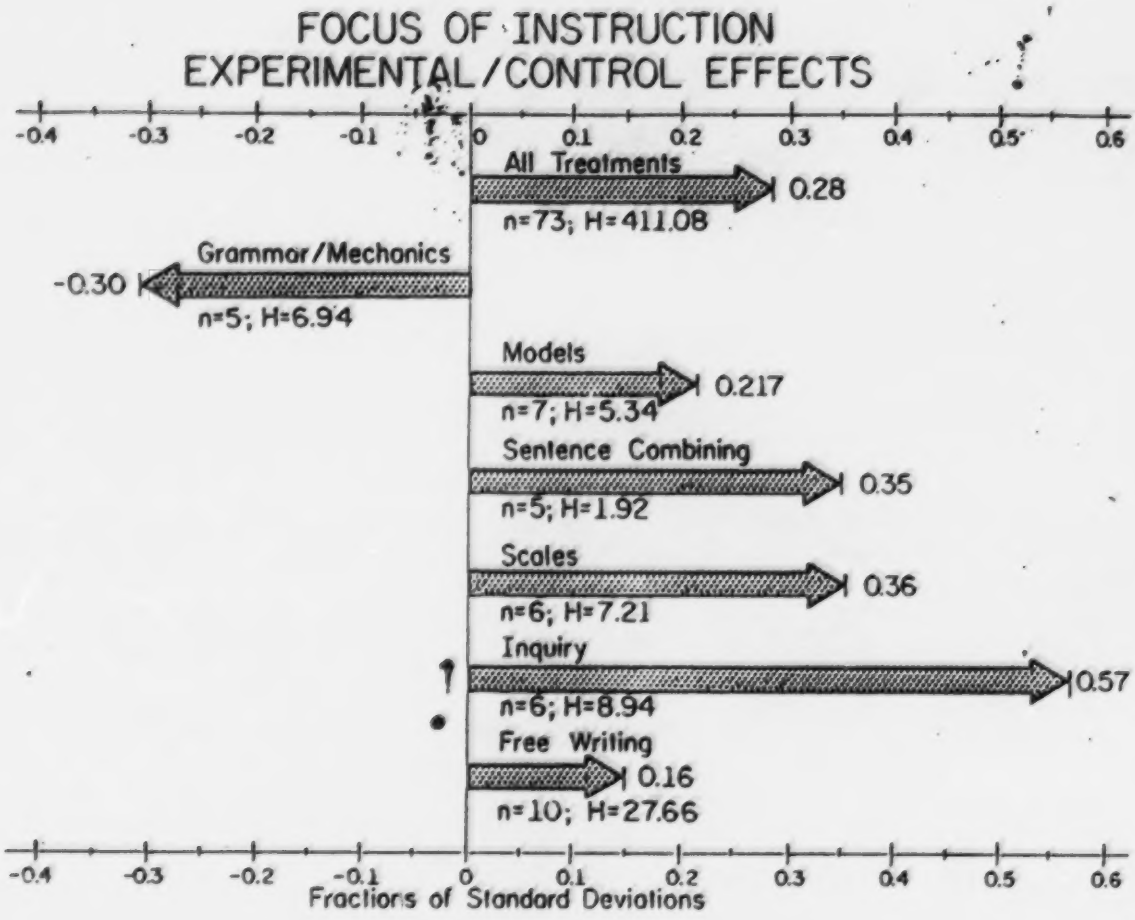
APPENDIX A

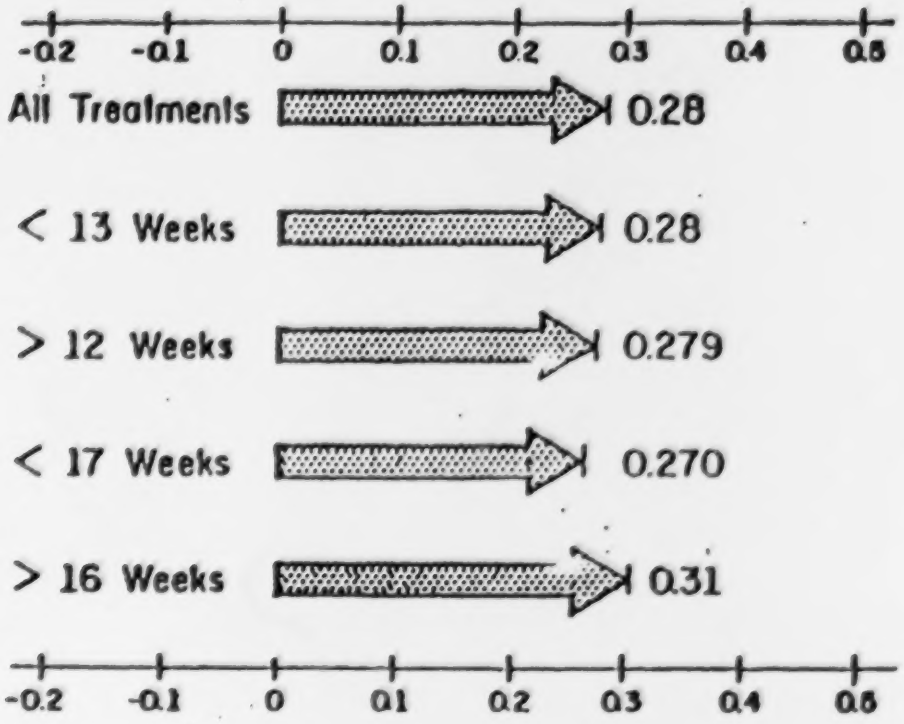
RESULTS OF META-ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHING OF WRITING

MODE OF INSTRUCTION
EXPERIMENTAL/CONTROL EFFECTS




FOCUS OF INSTRUCTION
EXPERIMENTAL/CONTROL EFFECTS
-0.4
-0.3
-0.2
-0.1
0
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
0.5
0.6
All Treatments
0.28
n=73; H=411.08
Grammar/Mechanics
-0.30
n=5; H=6.94
Models
0.217
n=7; H=5.34
Sentence Combining
0.35
n=5; H=1.92
Scales
0.36
n=6; H=7.21
Inquiry
0.57
n=6; H=8.94
Free Writing
0.16
n=10; H=27.66
Fractions of Standard Deviations

DURATION
EXPERIMENTAL / CONTROL EFFECTS



APPENDIX B

STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEETS

The Snake

In the huge, dark caverns created by the Amazon jungle, a snake wound its way slowly down the trunk of a tall, mighty, vine-covered tree. The snake was thick, with emerald green skin and golden plates. Its eyes were alive with a crimson red, and a blue tongue flicked quickly from between its scaly lips. As it reached a lofty bough, it uncoiled itself and hung down like a rope loosely twisted around a stick.

The snake dropped quickly now, for it had spotted a small hog drinking at the river's edge. So swiftly and silently did it race down and sleekly slip into the cool, clear water that not a sound was made. The hog looked up and then lowered his head again to drink the fresh, clean water. Silently the snake whipped his body into motion, undulating rapidly through the river pools. His head keenly cut the water and his trailing body churned under-currents that barely broke the surface. He could see the hog now. He let himself sink to the bottom and trailed along the crevices letting his eyes and nostrils faintly break the surface.

The hog drank still, quenching his thirst. Now the snake violently whipped his head, digging wildly into the boar's leg. The hog shrieked and squealed, kicking wildly and pulling away. The snake pulled back and whipped a coil of his body tightly around the hog's neck, then another and another until he and the hog tumbled violently into the shallows. He pulled his mighty constricting muscles together and there were a few sudden snaps. He dragged the hog away after relinquishing his hold and silently ate it below the cool turquoise depths.

Pretest--Student A

Write about an event (real or imaginary) and its consequences, that concerned you or someone you know. Be as specific as you can in describing the event and its consequences. Try to write so that a reader of your composition will see what you saw and feel what you felt.

One day my girlfriend, Swaney and Me were walking on a highway, when this car came by and tried to hit us, but Swaney saw the car coming and she screamed and pulled me out of the way. Then the car turned around and started chasing us and both of us started running and we jumped over the guide rail and rolled down the hill. We ran through a tunnel and at the other end the man was standing there waiting for us so we turned around and ran the other way. We saw a man driving a car that we knew and he took us to the police station and they we after the man and captured him. Later we found out that he was an escaped convict from a mental prison.

After that I was so scared I couldn't sleep for a few nights and I had bad nightmares. Now I'm real scared of the same spot where that happened and I'll never go back there again.

Post-test--Student A

Me and Nancy were walking down a highway one night. It was dark and dreary and the sky was filled with dark clouds floating all around the sky. When all of the sudden this car came speeding by us like a bolt of lightning and then it stopped and backed up. Right then I knew it was heading straight for us. My heart was bounding with fright, my knees shaking nervously, I felt like crying

Post-test Student A cont.

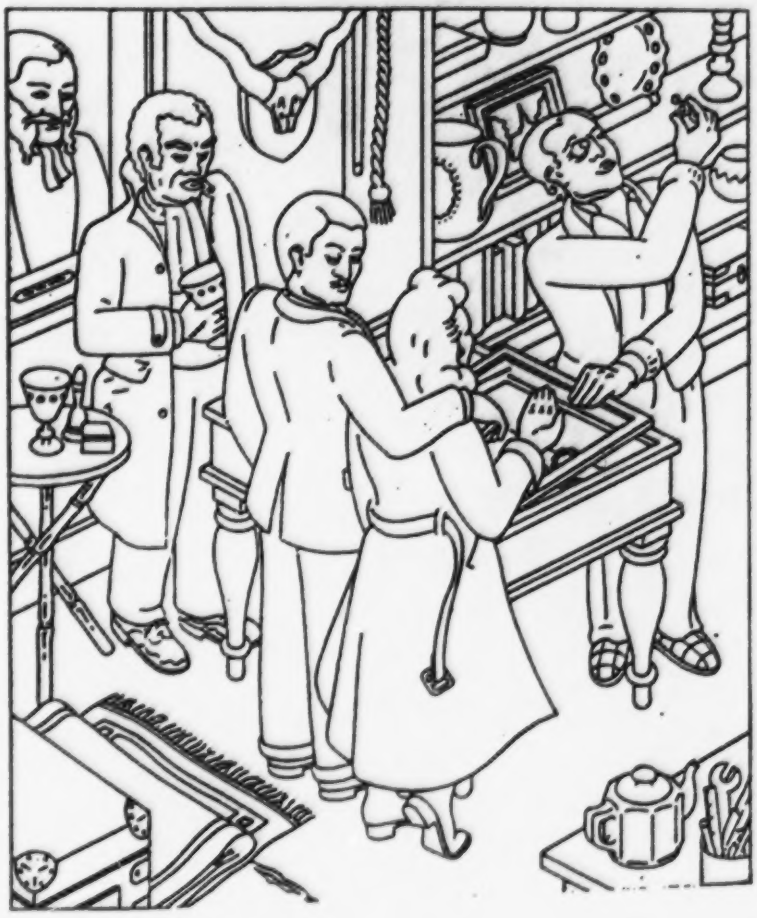
or screaming but I was frozen.

We started running, but the car was still following us. Then the car stopped and the man got out, he was a tall, skinny man with big dark sunglasses. I didn't have to turn around to see if he was still there, I could hear the heals clicking along the sidewalk and his breathing getting heavier as he got closer.

We ran faster and faster. I could feel my muscles breaking from exhaustion and the pain in my legs, like I had a thousand pins and needles in my body. Finally we ran up to a house and the people let us in and called the police. The police caught the guy. The guy was on dope and he was so crazy he kept saying he wanted to kill us because we deserved it.

From then on, no more highways at night for me.

IN THE ACT



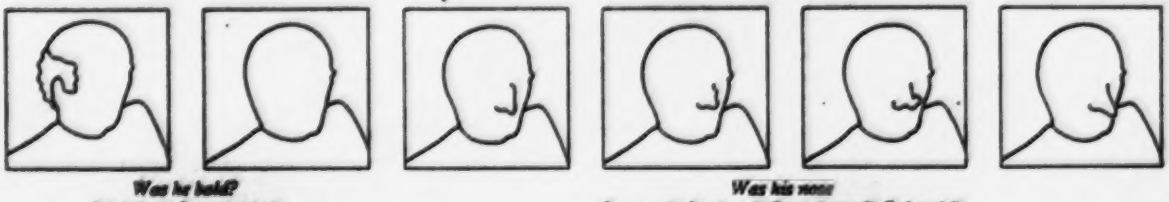
IN THE ACT II*

Age:
Under 40 ☐ 40-60 ☐ Over 60 ☐
Height:
Under 6 feet ☐ Over 6 feet ☐
Weight:
Thin ☐ Medium ☐
Overweight ☐
Identifying marks:
Birthmark ☐
Scars ☐
Wearing a ring?
Yes ☐ No ☐

Lips:
Full ☐ Thin ☐
Lower lip bulging ☐
Ears:
Small ☐ Close to head ☐
Large lobes ☐
Face shape:
Round ☐ Oval ☐ Square ☐

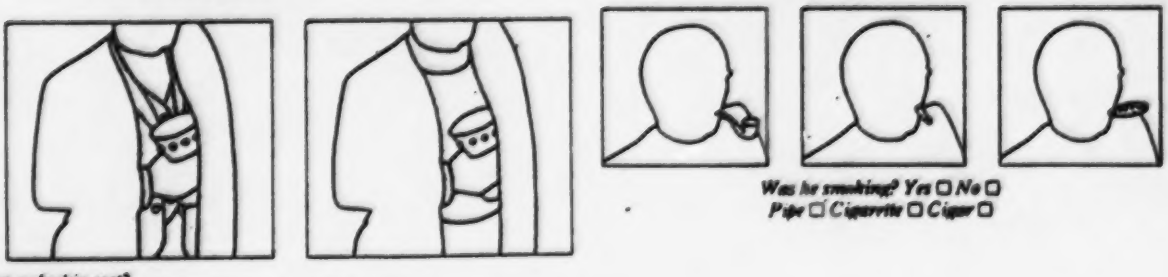
Was he wearing a hat? Yes ☐ No ☐
Beret ☐ Flat cap ☐

Was his hair
Curly ☐ Short ☐ Sticked down ☐ Dishevelled ☐



Was he bald?
Slightly ☐ Completely ☐

Was his nose
Roman ☐ Broken ☐ Strawberry ☐ Pointed ☐



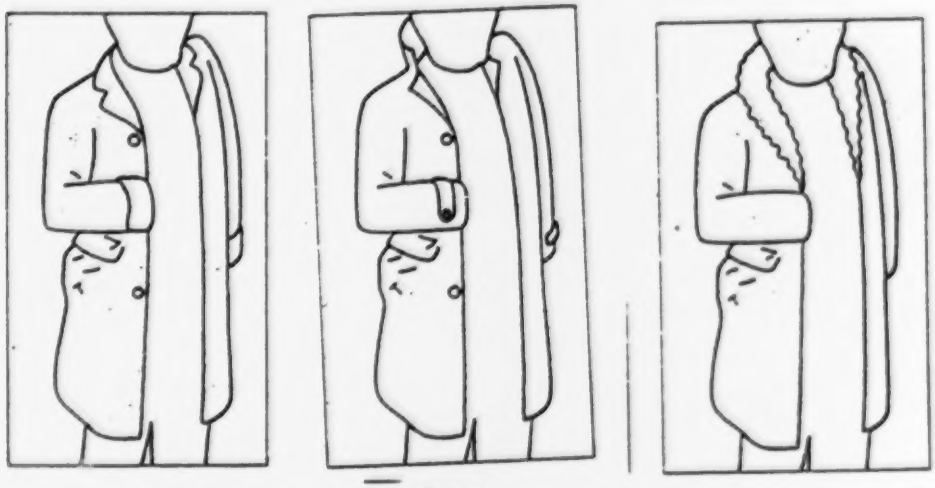
Was he smoking? Yes ☐ No ☐
Pipe ☐ Cigarette ☐ Cigar ☐

What was he wearing under his coat?
suit ☐ jersey ☐

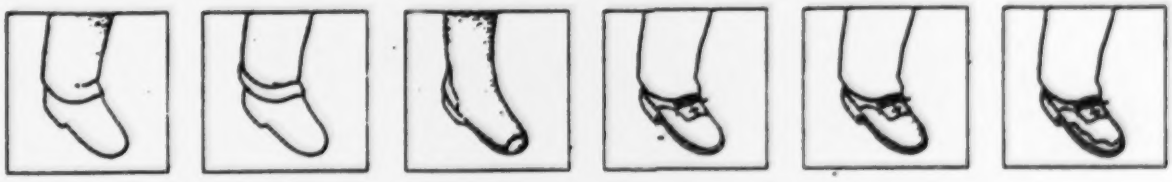
Was he wearing glasses? Yes ☐ No ☐
Horn rims ☐ Dark glasses ☐ Half frames ☐

Was he clean shaven? Yes ☐ No ☐ Trimmed moustache ☐
Full moustache ☐ Moustache and beard ☐

What was he wearing around his neck?
Tie ☐ Scarf ☐ Bowtie ☐ Nothing ☐



What kind of coat did he wear? overcoat ☐ Raincoat
coat with fur collar ☐ Was the collar turned up? Yes ☐ No ☐



Was he wearing Boots ☐ shoes ☐ Were they clean? Yes ☐ No ☐

*adapted from Lawrence Treat. The Clue Armchair Detective. New York: Ballantine Books, 1983.

SMELLS

1. Identify the substance that you smell _____

2. How does the smell feel? Smooth? Abrasive? Rough? Give at least three words.

_____

_____

_____

3. How does it move? Does it creep, surround, push, etc.?

_____

_____

4. Compare the smell to something else that will help describe it.

The smell is like _____.

5. Combine the best details you have written into a sentence that identifies the substance and describes its smell. Imagine that you have just entered a place and noticed this smell.

Example: As I opened the door, the rasping stink of the ammonia kicked me in the face.

_____

_____

_____

_____

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Create a comparison to describe each of the following.

Example: ***The saguaro cactus looks like a cowboy wearing a ten-gallon hat and reaching for his six-shooter.***

Avoid cliches--overused, unimaginative comparisons (e.g. ***The saguaro cactus is as skinny as a beanpole.***)

1. A crest that looks like a _____ extends from the tropical bird's head.
2. The woman's skin is like _____
3. The sides of the iceberg look like _____
4. The solar-powered car looks like a _____ with _____ on top.
5. Like a _____, the saguaro cactus peers across the desert.
6. The rows of jets look like _____

A VOLUPTUARY under the horrors of Digestion.

THE HIT

As I stepped up to the plate, I could hear the quiet cheers of the crowd in back of me. I laid down my bat on the just swept plate. I could feel my palms begin to sweat as the night air blew a gust of wind past my body. I reached down and picked up some dirt, and as I did, I could feel the heat from the large lights of the ballpark.

I stood up and took a step back from the plate to take a couple of practice swings. My muscles felt tight but began to loosen up as I swung the bat. Finally, the umpire said, "OK, let's play ball!"

I felt my adrenalin pump through my body. I knew that I had to hit a home run because it was the ninth inning with two outs against us, and we had our worst hitter coming up after me. I laid the bat on my shoulder very gently and took a deep breath while waiting for the pitcher to go into his windup. Finally, the pitcher nodded his head to show he agreed with the signal from the catcher, and he leaned back into his windup. To me he looked almost motionless until he reached forward and released the ball into its swirling orbit. The ball came so fast that it almost caught me off guard. I knew if I waited any longer the ball would go whirling past me, and I would miss a perfect pitch. So I swung the bat around with all my might and hoped that I would make contact. I knew that I really hit the ball because I heard a cracking noise and then I felt a tingling sensation running from my fingers up to my forearm.

At first I could not see the ball in the night sky so I almost thought that I had hit it out of bounds. Yet I heard the crowd cheering so I knew the ball must still be flying in the air. Then I spotted it sailing way up in the sky.

I dropped my bat and ran while at the same time keeping an eye on the ball. I rounded first still running my hardest. Half way to second I dropped my head and put all my might into it because I saw the ball drop right in front of the left fielder's feet. I knew I had to get all the way home. I rounded second. The third base coach signaled for me to stop at third, but I knew that I could make it. I rounded third at full steam, took a wide turn, and headed for home. I saw the catcher getting ready to catch the ball so I took a diving leap, stretching all my muscles to touch home plate.

I hit the ground with a thump and began to slide. I could not see anything through all of the dust. I reached for the plate and looked up at the umpire. He stood there very still, and then both arms flung to the side as he called me "Safe!!"

ZIPPER

When I arrived at the carnival, it was packed. It was nighttime and the air was warm, not hot. The florescent lights encircling the rides illuminated the sky, and bit into the darkness. There were screams from the general direction of the Zipper, and they attracted my friends and I to it. It was towering above everything, except the Ferris Wheel. It was 70 cents for a ticket, 20 cents more than most of the other rides, but that just made it seem more worthwhile. As we stood in line, we could hear the groaning and screeching of the gears as they moved faster. The cars were tossed upside down with seemingly no effort. There was loud blaring music, so distorted it was impossible to distinguish the words. Finally it was our turn, and three of us entered the small, cramped car. The seats were cracked leather, and the whole car was padded. There were bars to hold onto, they had been painted a bright yellow, but the paint had long since chipped off where people had held tightly onto it. The car started upwards with a protesting groan, and when it reached the top it flopped over, and we were tossed around like rag dolls. It was impossible to stay seated in one place for very long, and every time we turned someone gave an involuntary scream. Finally we slowed and when they opened the door we stumbled out on rubbery, weak legs. We staggered around for awhile, and then headed back for the ticket office.

MY ADVENTURE

During the hot, dry summer when mostly everyone is swimming in the cool, sparkling waters of pools, my family and me were heading toward Dayton, Ohio. We left early in the sunny morning even before the cheerful, whistling birds. I was going because I was competing in championships for Irish dancing. I wasn't extremely nervous but more excited than anything else. We finally arrived and stopped at this new high-rise hotel. The next day was the big day. Before I danced I put on my orange-red celtic costume with embroidery from the Book of Kelts. Then it was time to dance. My dancing was good. I had high leaps, it looked like I was dancing in air. But all of a sudden when I was spinning around, I fell. But I got up and finished the step. I didn't win 1-3, but I placed 4th. If I hadn't fallen, I would have won. But everyone said I was a good sport. That was my prize of the day.

The Greatest Moment of My Life

The greatest moment of my life was immagrating to the United States from Cambodia because, we were made slaves. Our family had to work the whole week for 18 hours in the midst of summer on the rice fields and only one meal aday; it was not tasty, only rice and water. It was terrifying living in a country of death. We were lucky to come to the United States or we might not be alive; for it was a nun who took us out of our horrifying life. It was strange at first to be in another country of freedom, buildings and automobiles but we learned to live a normal life, by going to school, our parents having a job. United States is a great country compared to Cambodia.

Evaluation Sheet: Descriptive/Narrative Writing

Name of writer _____

Names of evaluators _____

_____

Very Good to Excellent - 4 *Good* - 3 *Satisfactory* - 2 *Unsatisfactory* - 1

I. Use of specific detail _____

A. List several of the most specific details the writer includes:

B. Mark with a "*" any places in the composition where more detail should be included.

II. Use of detail and imagery from a variety of senses _____

A. Check each sense described effectively:

Sight _____
Sound _____
Touch _____
Smell _____
Taste _____

B. The writer should add details from which other senses to the composition?

Where?

III. Use of figurative language (simile, metaphor, etc.) _____

A. List several examples of figurative language used effectively in the composition.

IV. Use of dialogue and/or direct quotations _____

A. Mark with a "+" any places where the writer could effectively include dialogue and/or direct quotations.

V. Clear central or dominant impression _____

A. What central or dominant impression do you think the writer is trying to create for the reader?

B. What parts of the composition are best in creating this impression? Why?

C. What parts are least effective in creating this impression? Why?

TOTAL _____

The Soccer Game

Last weekend I was in a soccer game against Hammond. It was almost the end of the game when I scored for our team. Our Coach called me out of the game. He welcomed me to the side with a cheering smile. He yelled, "that's the way to do it" and he asked How I got the goal. I replied, I got a pass from Charlie and I kicked the ball inches from the goalie and then it went in." My coach said, "that I'm improving at the game and that I will be fantastic in the years to come." As I sat down on the boggy grass, my dad came over and he commented on the great score I made. I said, "I just got lucky." My dad asked, "If I needed a ride at the end of the game" and I said, "yes, I need a ride." Then me and my family drove home from the thrilling soccer game.

The Soccer Game Revision Assignment

1. Suppose you were a movie director making a film called "A Thrilling Game." They gave you this script. What scene do you think is missing?_____

2. Try to visualize the scoring of the goal from the moment the writer gets the first pass. What do you see? Hear?_____

3. Describe how the scorer feels as he is going down the field. What's he thinking about? What are some of his bodily sensations?_____

4. What does he see, hear?_____

5. Describe in detail the scoring of the goal and what happened immediately after. _____

6. Describe the behavior of the scorer and describe how he felt immediately after he scored. _____

22

There was a minute in the thrilling soccer game left. Our team, the vikings were tied with Hammond 1 to 1. I was dribbling the ball at a fast pace down the field. I could hear the other teams feet trembling against the hard, dry ground. The light-weighted soccer ball was gliding over the hard surface everytime I gave it a soft tap. My heart starting pumping faster as I closed up on the other goalie. My teammate, Charlie was following me on my right side. My feet felt like two humming birds flying to their nests. The fullback on the other team was pushing my shoulders trying to lure the ball away. I passed the ball to Charlie who was just a few feet ahead of me. He ~~dropp~~ dribbled the ~~boo~~ ball to the goalies box then he centered it to me. I started shaking like a leaf as I kicked the ball past the darting goalie and into the big goal net. I started jumping for joy as my teammates came around me to share my happiness.